

SAVING TIME IS A MYTH: MANAGE YOUR TIME

By Denise Landers

Myth: You can save time.

There is no way you can bank unused hours. Each hour gets spent. Time is the most democratic of resources. Everyone is given the same amount every day. Since every minute is nonrenewable, all that matters is how you are using your time this minute.

You might recognize these two colleagues who started work in the same department at the same time.

Meet John: He is the last one to turn in work on a group project. He can take days to respond to messages. He surrounds himself with stacks of papers on every available surface. He stays late at least three days a week. His family has not had dinner with him in the last month. He complains about the amount of work he is expected to get done. He is too tired to do anything extra on weekends, so ends up watching TV. He is bitter about not being given a job with more responsibility.

Meet Tom: He has never missed a deadline. He leaves his desk cleared at the end of each day. He holds board positions on 3 community associations. He coaches his son's baseball team. He takes his full allotment of vacations each year. He has been promoted several times within the company.

Truth: You can manage time.

Where do you begin when you are trying to change your spending habits? It is so easy to succumb to the tyranny of the urgent. You are pumped with adrenaline all day as you respond to multiple demands and constant crises. Being so busy, you never stop to evaluate how you could limit the demands with some basic time management tactics. By analysis and planning you could also decrease the number of urgent matters that arise due to setting things aside for too long.

If you are acting like John but want to live like Tom, start by deciding what your priorities are, both long-term and short-term. Every activity you perform should be measured against those priorities to ensure that the most important ones get done first.

Once you know where you are headed, create daily systems to deal with all the incoming items. The proverbial "Handle a piece of paper one time only" does not work. However the underlying meaning for that has validity. You need to make a decision the first time on every item coming into your office and into your life.

To make the decision, use my **RAFT** method to navigate through the stacks and keep you from getting swamped:

READ
ACT
FILE
TOSS.

Every item and every task will fit into one of those categories. The most difficult one for most people is the ACT section.

To determine where to place an action file, ask yourself two questions: What is my next step? When will I have a reasonable chance of doing this?

With your priorities defined and your daily actions set up, you are free to focus on one thing at a time. You are now managing your time instead of letting others manage it for you.